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Adoption of the report of the Committee on its fifty-seventh session

Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions: evaluation

(Item 5 (b))

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the evaluation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

1. At its 10th meeting, on 9 June 2017, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (E/AC.51/2017/3).

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services introduced the report and, together with representatives of OIOS and UNRWA, responded to questions raised during its consideration by the Committee.

Discussion

3. Delegations commended UNRWA for its essential contribution to the peace process in the Middle East and for its important humanitarian work in support of Palestine refugees, notably in areas such as education and health and in the improvement of their standard of living (the definition of which was questioned, with a delegation asking whether the standard of living for refugees in Europe was the same as that for refugees in other regions, including Asia). Delegations highlighted that the Agency was operating under increasingly complex and challenging circumstances, owing to constantly evolving external factors.

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4. Delegations commented on the lack of resources experienced by the Agency, noting that the number of refugees was constantly increasing, and asked what had been accomplished to broaden the donor base. A delegation emphasized that international commitments to resource mobilization and stabilization were important factors that had further affected the effectiveness of the Agency in meeting the growing needs of Palestine refugees in the region, adding that OIOS could have put forward actionable recommendations in that regard. The delegation recalled that international cooperation, including cooperation among donor countries, was required to ensure that adequate resources were provided. A delegation enquired as to the timeline for the implementation by the Agency of its management response and recommendation action plan, as set out in the annex to the report; what measures had been implemented to improve transparency in the use of resources as an important means of attracting additional funding from the international community; and whether in-kind assistance, such as clothing or means of transportation, from Member States that could not provide cash contributions had been considered, including research on how such contributions would be utilized. In reference to paragraph 12 of the annex to the report, a delegation sought clarification of how a zero-growth budget for 2016 could be reconciled with the unprecedented and ever-increasing number of challenges encountered in the field.

5. Regarding staff resources, a delegation made reference to staff salary scale reform. A delegation acknowledged the need to improve efficiency, while commenting that the ratio of staff to population served was insufficient given the limitations that Palestine refugees faced with regard to livelihoods.

6. A delegation queried how the Agency worked with the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme to increase international mediation on hotspot issues, training and relief assistance associated with peace efforts and to address symptoms and root causes of problems faced by Palestine refugees.

7. Delegations enquired about the timing and data limitations associated with the evaluation, including: (a) whether the report had been completed in 2015 or 2016; (b) the reasons behind the exclusion of human rights work from the evaluation (para. 13); (c) the reasons behind the scarcity of reliable UNRWA-generated data (para. 15); (d) whether the Agency had been unwilling to provide evidence for its claims of progress in implementing OIOS recommendations or merely unable to do so before the report's finalization (para. 67); and (e) whether an attempt had been made to obtain data on or the views of Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, which appeared to be missing from data collected, and more broadly what difficulties the Agency was encountering in reaching and delivering services to that population.

8. A delegation sought clarification of whether the new 2016-2021 medium-term strategy incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals for the period 2015-2030, while underlining that the basis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was to leave nobody behind, and whether a reference to the 2030 Agenda could foster the channelling of necessary resources in support of the work of the Agency.

9. In line with recommendation 1, a delegation called for a stronger monitoring and evaluation function within the Agency so as to strengthen accountability in relation to the use of resources, to monitor the implementation of the 2016-2021 medium-term strategy in order to allow the Agency to deliver cost-efficiencies and to improve targeted core service delivery to those refugees most in need. A delegation expressed the view that monitoring and evaluation were crucial to improve internal management and the ability of the Agency to implement its mandate, to increase contributions from the international community, while taking

into account new challenges that might arise, and to improve the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Conclusions and recommendations

10. The Committee noted the challenging operational context in which UNRWA worked, commended it on its delivery of services to Palestine refugees despite those challenges and recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 68 and 70 of the report of OIOS on the evaluation of UNRWA, while noting that it was important for UNRWA to strengthen its accountability framework and its results-based monitoring and evaluation functions.